

Hi! My name is Leslie Monter-Casio and I am a junior at North Caroline High School on the Eastern shore. I am so incredibly grateful to be given the opportunity to potentially serve as your next Student Member on the Maryland Board of Education. I have always taken every opportunity available to become involved with my community and peers. Starting in Elementary school when I served as my school's SGA President, to becoming class president in Middle School, to now serving as my school's SGA VP and SMOB for Caroline County.

Prior to moving to Caroline County, I grew up in Prince George's County. This experience helped me understand one crucial idea. Students, on completely different ends of the state, were experiencing similar issues within the public school system. Issues, like underrepresentation of the student voice, stigmatization and a lack of mental health resources, and limited access to pre-college and career counseling. Policymakers don't realize that these aren't issues specific to individual schools, or counties, or even regions. These are state issues. These are issues that are disproportionately impacting the future of tens of thousands of students. I currently work on a local level to address these issues by pushing for the creation of "mental health" rooms in schools, student unions that focus on addressing racial/cultural equity, and a countywide SGA and student focus group so local students can voice what matters to them. If chosen as your state SMOB I will not be afraid to confront the harsh inequities that thousands of students have to face and take the necessary actions to eliminate them.

The role of the SMOB is to be an advocate, to be a listener, to be reliable. When I see injustice, I am not afraid to speak up about it. I am dedicated and determined to improve the student experience within the public school system.

Some changes I would implement and advocate for include:

- (1) **Increase accessibility to pre-college and career resources** - I will push for free access to SAT/ACT prep courses and exams, a culturally diverse network of pre college/career counselors, opening up student internship/research opportunities through collaboration with local organizations in order to close the opportunity gap.
- (2) **Increase academic support and opportunities to ESOL, immigrant, and first generation college students** - Policymakers don't address the systemic barriers that are hindering the achievement of marginalized students. Implementation of after school buses, ESOL STEAM courses, counseling on the college application and FAFSA process, free AP/SAT/ACT exams, and sanctuary schools is needed to restore faith and trust in the system.
- (3) **Amplify and place greater value on the student voice, especially those from underrepresented counties in the Eastern Shore and Southern MD** - As a student from the Eastern Shore myself I have seen firsthand how rural area students are not given the opportunity to share their voice. Change is the result of collaboration. I plan to open up more opportunities for students from underrepresented, and marginalized to advocate for themselves. Additionally, I have seen firsthand how students from rural counties are led to believe by the school system that they cannot be successful. Opening up opportunities for rural students to become leaders will allow school system's to realize rural-area students are just as capable of going to Ivy-League colleges, receiving full ride scholarships, opening up their own businesses, and achieving great things as their Northern Maryland counterparts.

I want to work with **YOU**. The students. The voice. The people. To break barriers and build opportunities. To reform the public school system into one that students can be proud of, rely on, and trust. A school system that students deserve.

